

PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS OF CHILD CARE SERVICES:
IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

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INTRODUCTION

Background

Child care is a vital resource in support of children and their families. Since World War II, there has been a steady growth in the number and percent of women with young children who enter the labor force and need child care. Yet there is neither a national policy nor sufficient funds to increase the number of child care slots available. Each year more and more mothers, especially those with young children, join the labor force. It is estimated that by 1995, 46 percent of the American labor force will be female, representing about 13 million more women than present in 1980 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1985).

Approximately 20 million children age 13 and under live in families in which both parents present in the home work (Grossman, 1981). The growing number of families in which all parents in the home work can be attributed to spiraling inflation during the past decade and economic recession, as well as personal choice. According to the Bureau of the Census, fifty-one percent (51%) of working mothers with children under age three are in the labor force, while fifty-four percent (54%) of working parents have children between the ages of three and five (O'Connell, 1983).

Although families report experiencing tremendous difficulties in finding child care they need at a price they can afford, policy analysts and policy-makers are openly skeptical of the need for demand for public child care expansion (Woolsey, 1977). With the advent of "new federalism" we have witnessed significant change in directions of national policy in terms of facilitating the availability of child care services at the local level.

For example, the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981 (P.L. 97-35) incorporated budget reductions and legislative changes in social programs in response to the Reagan Administration's economic recovery program. The social programs experiencing budget reductions provided funds for child care services for low-income families. As a result of federal budget cuts and changes in eligibility criteria, national policy related to child care services has adversely affected the availability of child care (Children's Defense Fund, 1982, 1983).

Proponents of the "new federalism" initiatives argue that child care is a private family issue and if any public funds are to be expended for such care, it should be by state and local governments or in tax deductions to working parents. Opponents

of "new federalism" have argued that the education, care, and safety of young children is an area of national public concern and federal responsibility. Therefore, federal funds are considered appropriate for the support of child care.

Since the initial enactment of budget cuts and changes in eligibility criteria for participation in federal social programs, the Reagan Administration has maintained that families truly in need of social services have not been denied support; the quality and availability of services for families truly in need has not diminished; state and local governments as well as the private sector can and will meet the social responsibilities previously addressed by the federal government.

It does not appear, however, that the critical national decisions which affect the lives of millions of families with children are being made with adequate information, debate, or care.

Federal Child Care Policy The first significant use of federal funds for child care came with the Depression of the 1930's. The federal government established funds to be shared among the States for the establishment of nursery schools for young children of low-income parents (Grotberg, 1977). This effort was a part of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) program. The primary objective was to provide employment for unemployed teachers, nurses, nutritionists, cooks, and janitors.

The WPA nurseries were notable in two respects. First, public funds, both federal and state, became available for child care. Secondly, the WPA nursery schools provided much more than custodial care for children. State departments of education established the child care programs, thus providing an early educational focus to the programs; nutrition and health services were also emphasized (Costin, 1979).

The next great national emergency, World War II, again occasioned the establishment of federally supported "day care" centers. Since the government wanted to maximize the number of women who would work, child care would serve as an incentive to attract women to war industries and keep them on the job. In August 1942, the U.S. Congress appropriated funds for the child care centers under the Lanham Act, or as it was called, the Community Facilities Bill (Grotberg, 1977).

After the war, the number of centers decreased. The federal government stopped funding child care centers in 1946 (Pidgeon, 1974). In spite of the expectation that mothers would return to their "places in the home" after the war, many women did not give up their jobs and many more continued to enter the labor force (Authier, 1979). The increase of employed mothers took place without federal assistance for child care and without public

demand for such assistance.

The 1960's ushered in another period of federal involvement in child care. Recognition of the need for child care services for working mothers was acknowledged in the recommendations of the 1960 White House Conference on Children and Youth (Grotberg, 1977). The early 1960's was a period of growing awareness and acceptance of social responsibility for the education and care of young children.

The 1962 Amendments to the Social Security Act provided the first federal funding for child care since World War II (Costin, 1979). Under the act, the definition of "social services" was expanded to include a wide range of problems endured by children, including the need for child care. Later in 1975, Title XX of the Social Security Act became the major federal funding authority for child care services.

Prior to the passage of the Social Security Amendments of 1975 (Title XX), federal matching funds for social services, including child care, provided under Title IV-A, of the Social Security welfare programs was mandatory and open-ended. Each dollar spent by a State was matched by three federal dollars. In 1972, a cap was placed on federal funding for social service programs for FY '73 and subsequent years (Mott, 1976). From 1977 to 1979, temporary legislation was enacted which provided an additional funding allocation earmarked for child care.

Through the years, Congress has enacted a range of legislation related to child care. In most cases, child care has been one component of a program which also provides funds for other services. During the last half of the 1960's and the decade of the 1970's, funding for child care and other social service programs experienced rapid growth. This growth was halted in FY '82 when many programs experienced budget cuts though provisions of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981. (P.L. 97-35). Most of these programs face additional funding reductions under the Reagan Administration's Budget Proposals through FY '86.

There are two major federal programs which provide direct support for child care: the Title XX Social Services Block Grant and the Child Care Food Program.

P.L. 97-35, Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (1981), created the new Title XX-Social Services Block Grant which replaced the Title XX-Federal State Matching Program. Each State receives a portion of the block grant and has the discretion to decide which services they will provide. The new block grant eliminated an earmark of \$200 million in federal funds for child care and removed the provision which stipulated that fifty percent of the federal funds had to be targeted to low-income families.

According to the Children's Defense Fund (1983), over 150,000 families have lost all or part of their Title XX funded child care services as funding has been reduced by twenty-one percent. Other impacts include: child care centers are serving fewer low-income children; fewer resources available to centers have lowered the quality of care for children; with the loss of staff and services, child care centers are finding it harder to meet the needs of families they serve.

The second primary federal program which provides direct funds for child care is the Child Care Food Program. This program, authorized by Sec. 17 of the National School Lunch Act, provides funds for states to initiate and maintain food service programs including meals and snacks for children in public or private non-residential child care programs. The program has provided services to approximately 900,000 children, seventy percent of whom are from low-income families (Children's Defense Fund, 1983).

As a result of budget cuts included in the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981 (P.L. 97-35), the Child Care Food Program was cut by thirty percent. Federal support for meals in many child care centers was reduced substantially or lost. At one time, children could receive up to three meals and two snacks a day. Children now receive only two meals and one snack, regardless of the hours they remain in care. Other program changes include the following: prior law limited participation to children age 18 or younger, while current law limits participation to children age 12 or younger; reimbursement rates for snacks are reduced; providers are no longer eligible for grants for child care food service equipment (P.L. 97-35).

Recent surveys suggest the availability and quality of child care services has been adversely affected by funding cuts in other federal programs (Children's Defense Fund, 1982 and 1983; Kent County, 1982; Center for Study of Policy, 1983). Many programs lost staff when the Public Service Employment component of the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) was eliminated. For families receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the amount a family can claim for work-related child care is limited to \$160 a month, while under prior law the federal government did not restrict reimbursement rates for child care.

Another program which provides comprehensive child care services to pre-school children is Project Head Start. The Head Start program was enacted as part of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 to provide child care services for low-income families. Since 1965, Head Start has provided medical, dental, nutritional, educational, social, and mental health services to 7.8 million children and their families (Children's Defense Fund, 1982).

President Reagan labelled Project Head Start a proven effective program. Although Head Start's direct funding has been protected against severe budget cuts, numerous programs that supplement Head Start have been cut. These programs include: the Child Care Food Program, CETA, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, Food Stamps, Medicaid, and Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children.

New Federalism The phrase "new federalism" has recently received a lot of attention and has been the bases for debate among government administrators and officials, policy-makers, and the general public. Though there is little consensus as to the meaning of the concept of federalism, there is general agreement that it should be regarded as a device or tool concerned with the practice of government (Leach, 1976). Federalism involves the relationships among levels of government in planning the execution of governmental programs.

During the 1960's, the federal government assumed primary responsibility for developing and implementing social programs. The next decade was marked by a change in national policy as block grants were initially created to facilitate effective accountability for expenditures and to control the rate of growth in expenditures (Mott, 1976).

Under the Administration, President Reagan is redefining the role of the federal government in the federalist system. Current "new federalism" initiatives promote a fundamental redistribution of responsibility for domestic functions of government. Under the Reagan plan, the federal government would eventually withdraw from some functions completely (The Budget of the United States, 1984).

A primary goal of the Administration is to reduce the size and cost of the federal budget and control government spending in certain areas such as human services. Related to this goal is interest in reducing federal involvement in the affairs of state and local governments, to strengthen the role of the States, and to increase the autonomy and flexibility of state and local governments in their expenditure decisions. Finally, President Reagan would like to remove the federal government from the role of raising revenue to fund activities carried out by the states (Reagan, 1981).

Another basic assumption inherent in the new federalism concept is that States and local governments will be able and willing to pick up the responsibilities previously performed by the federal government, specifically funding. A preliminary survey of local and state government response to the new federalism initiative in this regard tends to refute the assumption that state and local governments can and will pick up the monetary

slack needed to fund social programs (National Governors Association, 1981).

The extent to which the new federalism initiative will impact the provision of child care services at the local level will be most immediately felt by the consumers of child care services. Therefore the perceptions of parents on the child care their children receive in light of the changes in federal policies which support child care are important to the issue of public support for child care. An evaluation of such perceptions will focus attention on the issue which should result in increased awareness and support for adequate child care services. It is also critical to evaluate the impact of initiatives in inter-governmental relations which ultimately impact the lives of all of us.

Purpose of the Study

The perceptions of parents are critical to evaluating the impact of federal policies on child care services. In a democratic society, public policies are expected to be responsive to the needs of citizens affected by those policies. Therefore, this study was directed toward parental perceptions of child care services because they are useful for child care advocates to influence the direction of federal child care policy.

Parents of children in child care centers which receive federal funds to subsidize the cost of care should be aware of the impact of changes in federal policies to the extent that such policy changes affect the finds of care available to them and the quality of care their children receive. Thus, the focus of this study was to examine how selected variables are associated with black parental perceptions of child care.

The black family will be the unit of focus in this study for several reasons. First, there is a need for race-specific data that would inform policy decisions regarding the nature of societal support to families for the care of children. Secondly, the need for child care is increasing among all segments of society, but in the black community this need is exacerbated by increased unemployment, and the growing numbers of single-parent families, oftentimes headed by women. Families with a female head have a poverty rate six times that of male-headed families and thirty-eight percent of all black children under 18 are poor (Bureau of Census, March 1982 Survey). Thirdly, among non-profit centers that receive federal subsidies, black children comprise forty-four percent (44%) of the total enrollment. Consideration of child care issues from a national perspective has special implications for the care of black children.

The parents in this study were selected from center-based programs in Washington, D.C., the nation's Capitol. The most recent national data available suggest that over 900,000 children each year receive either full or part-time care in center-based programs (Roupp et al, 1978). Approximately twenty-eight percent (28%) of these children are black; fifty percent (50%) come from families with incomes below the national median, while almost thirty percent (30%) have families living at or below the poverty level (Roupp, et al, 1978).

Based on the above discussions, the following theoretical questions are presented.

1. How do the demographic dimensions of type of family structure, presence of teens, and SES relate to parental perceptions of child care which are currently available to them?
2. How does the age of the child relate to parental perceptions of child care?
3. How does "when" care is needed relate to parental perceptions of child care?

In an attempt to answer these questions, the following hypotheses were posed and tested on a sample of black parents:

- Hypothesis 1: Among parents of children in center-based care, perceptions of child care will be more related to family structure than will be related to SES.
- Hypothesis 2: Among parents of children in center-based care, perceptions of child care will be more related to the child's age than will be related to SES.
- Hypothesis 3: Among parent of children in center-based care, perceptions of child care availability will be more related to "when" care is needed than will be related to SES.
- Hypothesis 4: Among parents of children in center-based care, perceptions of child care services will be more related to the presence of teens in the home than will be related to SES.

From the research questions and hypotheses, the dependent variable of the study is parental perceptions of child care. The independent variables are as follows:

- (1) Family structure
- (2) Presence of teens
- (3) Socio-Economic status (SES)
- (4) Age of child(ren)
- (5) "When" care is needed

Definition of Terms

Parental Perceptions of Center-based Care Services: This variable reflects what parents think about their child care arrangement. A subscale was developed which is designed to yield scores that will permit the responses to be utilized as interval measures which in turn allow the perceived level of child care to be placed within a range of high and low.

Family Structure: The classification of the family unit as being one parent, two parent, or multi-generational.

Presence of Teens: This variable refers to the presence of a young person(s) in the household between the ages of 13 and 18.

Socio-Economic Status (SES): A subjective methods of determining SES was developed and utilized. Subjects were asked to describe their SES as being either high, medium, or low.

Age of Child: This variable refers to the age of the child(ren) in the household (up to age 12).

"When" Care is Needed: This variable refers to the time of day or evening care is needed, as well as odd times, weekends, and holidays.

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised:

- Question 1: How do the demographic dimensions of type of family structure, presence of teens, and SES relate to parental perceptions of child care which is currently available to them?
- Question 2: How does the age of the child relate to parental perceptions of child care?

Question 3: How does "when" care is needed relate to parental perceptions of child care?

The above questions generate the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Among parents of children in center-based care, perceptions of child care services will be more related to family structure than will be related to SES.

Hypothesis 2: Among parents of children in center-based care, perceptions of child care services will be more related to the presence of teen(s) in the home than will be related to SES.

Hypothesis 3: Among parents of children in center-based care, perceptions of child care availability will be more related to the child's age than will be related to SES.

Hypothesis 4: Among parents of children in center-based care, perceptions of child care availability will be more related to "when" care is needed than will be related to SES.

This study was conducted on a sample of black parents who had children enrolled in center-based child care programs in Washington, D.C.

The research approach utilized in this dissertation was Ex Post Facto. This design was selected because there was a clear intention to obtain evidence relative to causal hypotheses concerning the relationships which were studied; variation on the independent variable is assumed to have occurred before variation on the dependent variable; the independent variables were not manipulated by the researcher.

A strength of this research design is that it is effective in showing degrees of relationship among the variables. Kerlinger (1973) suggests that "researchers should predict significant relations and non-significant relations whenever possible" (p. 392) despite the inherent weaknesses of this research design.

The weaknesses of the design include the lack of control over the independent variables, the inability to identify a single causal factor, and limited control over subjects in a natural setting. Despite the weaknesses, with the use of scientific investigation, the design most approximates real life.

Subjects

The subjects of this research study consisted of a non-probability sample of 138 parents of children enrolled in child care centers where public funds are expended for care. The purposive sampling technique employed allowed the researcher to obtain a representative sample by including respondents from fifteen (15) child care centers located throughout Washington, D.C., thus providing a broad representation of child care users. The purposive, non-probability sampling technique is not based on randomization, however, probability samples which are based on some form of random sampling are difficult to implement and very costly.

The cluster of child care centers from which the sample was generated is affiliated with a non-profit agency that promotes comprehensive child care programs in Washington, D.C. Children enrolled in the centers come from families with varied levels of income, however, a significant number of children attending these centers come from low-income neighborhoods where many children receive public assistance or live in marginal income families.

Permission was obtained from the Board of Directors of the Association to work with the center-based programs to collect the data. It was understood that the anonymity of the parents participating in the study would be protected and each parent participating in the study would be asked to sign a consent form. The Board of Directors did ask that the name of the Association not be used in the writing of the dissertation.

Instrumentation

A review of the research literature for existing survey instruments specifically appropriate for this study did not result in the identification of such an instrument. There were two survey instruments which were reviewed and were especially helpful in developing the "Perceptions of Child Care Survey" questionnaire.

The Family and Child Care Policy Project resulted in the development of a "Survey of Families and Child Care" questionnaire which asked black parents in South Los Angeles about the child care services they were currently using. The project, funded by the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children, Youth and Families, was designed to examine how child care supports the family unit and help family members carry out their roles effectively (Hill-Scott, 1979).

The other survey instrument which was reviewed and proved helpful was from a four-year study of urban family child care

conducted in three urban sites: Los Angeles, California; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and San Antonio, Texas. This research project, the National Day Care Home Study, engaged parents of racially and socio-economically diverse backgrounds in an assessment of their child care arrangements, their needs, and preferences (Davison and Ellis, 1981).

The research literature suggests that when parents are asked about child care "satisfaction" directly, "dissatisfaction" is virtually unapparent in the results (Hill-Scott, 1979; Davison and Ellis, 1981; Immerwahr, 1983; Porter, 1983). Researchers have found that when parents are asked about what child care arrangements they want or need in relationship to what is available to them, dissatisfaction with existing arrangements is more likely to be reflected in their responses.

The Perceptions of Child Care Survey (PCCS) was the primary instrument developed for the purpose of identifying parents' perceptions of child care services. There was a brief Family Survey developed to identify the demographic information of each family including family structure, the age of the children, the presence of teens, and a subjective measure of SES. Both questionnaires were designed to be self-administered and required less than forty minutes to complete.

The PCCS was designed to identify what parents think about the child care services available to the family considering the needs of the child and the family. A fourteen-item likert subscale focused on perceptions of child care (see copy in Appendix). The items measuring perceptions were developed and scored such that a high score indicated more positive perceptions while a low score represented negative perceptions.

The content validity of both subscales was assessed through the use of a panel of five experts to ensure the questions measure or address what they were designed to do. This group was impaneled after independent reviews of the instrument to discuss items that were questionable as well as the total instrument. This systematic process resulted in a valid tool for assessing the dependent variable of this study.

The reliability of the PCCS was established through the administration of a pre-test to evaluate the consistency of the scores and the precision of the instrument. The pre-test was conducted on ten parents who reside in the District of Columbia and who have young children. The ten parents represented a broad spectrum of socio-economic status. The Chronbach's alpha reliability coefficient on the pre-test group was .71. A Chronbach's alpha coefficient was also completed on the population sample and the result was .50.

Data Collection

The data for the study were collected from 138 parents of children enrolled in eleven child care centers throughout Washington, D.C. After permission was obtained from the Board of Directors of the child care Association with which these centers are affiliated, the directors of the child care centers were contacted by the Board. They were advised of the intent of the researcher's efforts, and the researcher was asked to contact each director to arrange a meeting with parents.

There were two major factors considered in developing a plan for reaching parents and securing their participation in the study. First, a majority of the parents work or are in work-related training; it was critical to make their participation in the study as convenient for them and as simple as possible. Secondly, "time" was a factor so far as completing the survey process within a four-month period, prior to the beginning of summer vacation.

It was therefore suggested that the survey activity take place during monthly parent meetings. Parents were contacted in advance of their meeting and informed of the meeting agenda which included a request for their participation in a research survey. They had therefore the option not to come to the meeting and after coming were informed of their option still not to participate.

Despite the careful attention given to constructing questionnaires which were focused, accurate and simple to complete and understand, the decision was made to ensure the researcher or representative was present during each parent meeting at which the survey was completed. This was critical to make certain detailed instructions were provided as well as an explanation for the study and the significance and importance of the input by parents in identifying their thoughts or perceptions of the child care services their Child(ren) received. It was also made clear that the combined results or findings from this research effort would be shared with the child care centers as well as with the parents.

A training session on completing the two questionnaires was planned and conducted by the research for two trained social workers who had agreed to assist in the survey activity, if needed. There was just one scheduled meeting which required the assistance of a trained volunteer. The volunteer reported no problems or unusual circumstances related to the proceedings of that session.

Most of the questions raised during the survey process were related to "how and why" the particular child care program was

selected and exactly how the information would be used. Again, despite efforts to allay any concerns about the reasons this study was being conducted, some parents asked about whether or not their participation in the study would influence their eligibility for subsidized child care. These concerns were raised and directed at the Family Survey portion of the questionnaire which contains income related questions.

For the most part, after receiving instructions and reviewing the PCCS and Family Survey instruments, the parents were able to complete the questionnaires in approximately thirty minutes or less.

FINDINGS

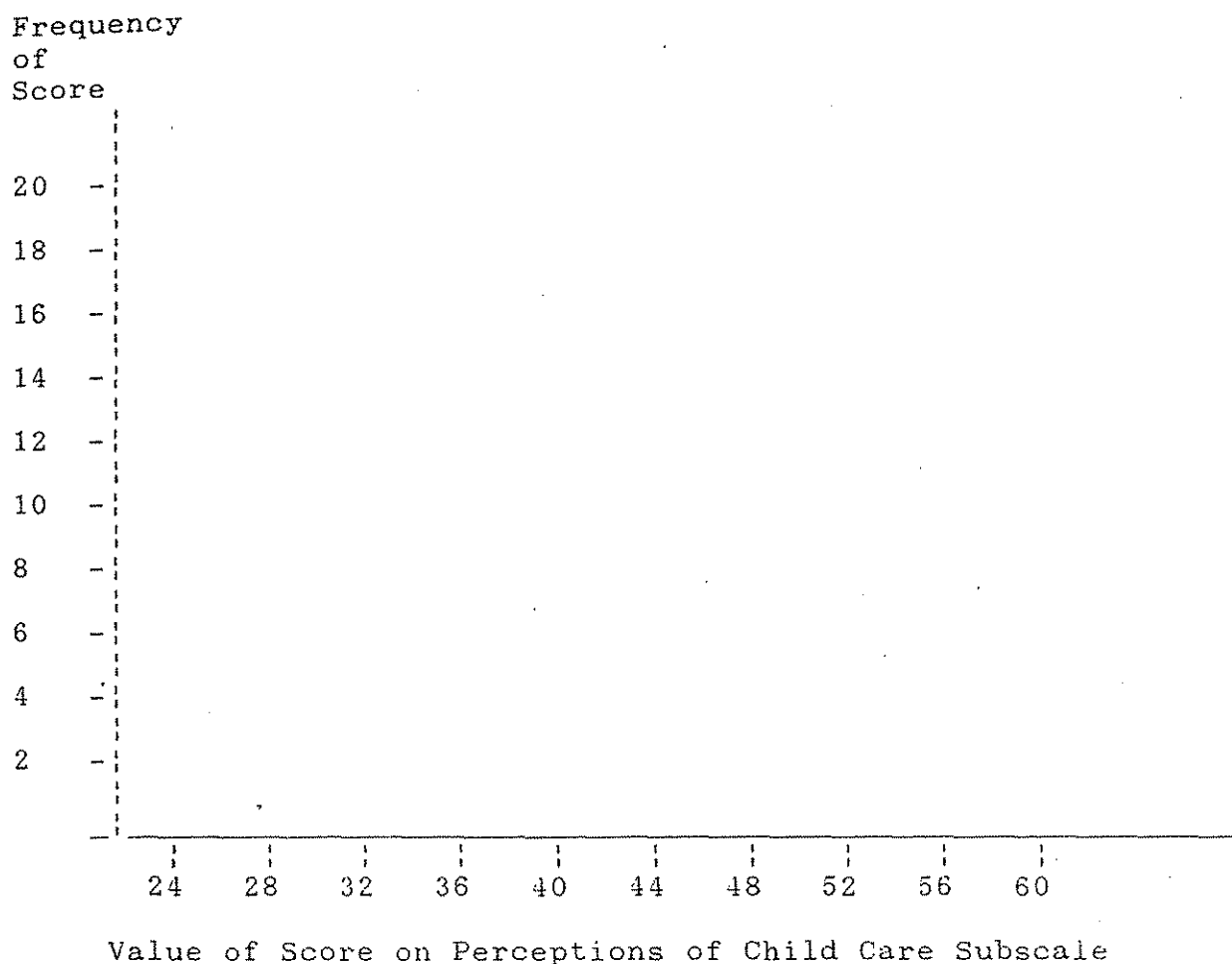
This section summarizes the results of the data analysis and covers the areas of (1) descriptive findings of the sample and (2) substantive statistical findings. The statistical tests used include chi square, multiple regression, t-tests, and analysis of variance.

Major Descriptive Findings

The section provides an illustrative presentation of the Perceptions of Child Care Survey scores and a descriptive analysis of characteristics of the study families. Statistical analyses are calculated based on the total response frequencies for each question. Therefore, while there were 138 subjects in the study, all totals will not equal 138.

The Perceptions of Child Care Services Subscale generated response scores ranging from 29 to 56. The largest possible score was 64, with higher scores indicating positive thoughts or perceptions of the child care services which are available. The mean score was 44.5 with a standard deviation of 5.3. The range of scores is illustrated in a frequency polygon which follows:

Fig: #1: Frequency Polygon on Perceptions of Child Care Scores



A profile of the sample reveals that 127 or 92.7 percent of the respondents were female and 7.3 percent or 10 respondents were male. In this study, families are defined as one-parent if respondents identified their marital status as single, divorced, widowed or separated. As reflected in Table 1, the majority of families (75.2 percent) were one-parent families. Parents who identified their marital status as married or living with (24.8 percent) were classified as two-parent families.

Table 1
Frequency and Percent of Marital Status for Survey Respondents

Marital Status	Frequency	Percent
Single	75	56.4%
Married	26	19.5
Divorced	6	4.5
Living Together	7	5.3
Widowed	1	.8
Separated	18	13.5
Total	133	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 170.92$, $df = 5$, $p < .001$

In addition to marital status, it is important to determine if the household could be classified as a multigeneration or nonmultigeneration family, meaning in-laws or grandparents live in the home. Table 2 provides a summary of univariate analysis on data relating to the generational nature of respondents' families. One hundred and seven (107) subjects (78.7 percent) responded negatively to the question, "Do your parents, grandparents or in-laws currently live with you?" Twenty-nine (29) subjects, for a total of 21.3 percent, did have a parent or grandparent living in the home.

Table 2

Frequency and Percent of Responses to Survey Question: "Do your parents, grandparents, or in-laws currently live with you?"

Response	Frequency	Percent
"Yes"	29	21.3%
"No"	107	78.7%
Total	136	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 43.4$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$

These findings indicate that most respondents belong to families where the current structure is nuclear with single heads of household and no grandparents or in-laws residing in the home.

The respondents were asked to indicate their highest level of education attainment as well as the highest level of education attained by the other parent of their child(ren). Education attainment among female and male parents in the sample was fairly equal and did not differ significantly ($\chi^2 = 2.84$, $p > .05$). Ten and one-half percent of the male parents had a college degree or had completed some graduate school training, while 10.8 percent of the female parents had similar experiences. Almost 67 percent of the male parents had a high school diploma or some college experience; among the female parents, 72 percent had a high school diploma or some college experience. Further description of these data is available in Table 3.

Table 3

Frequency and Percentage of Educational Level for the Child's Father and Mother

Educational Level	<u>Males</u>		<u>Females</u>	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Less than 12 years	26	22.6	22	16.7
High School Diploma	59	51.3	65	49.6
Some College	18	15.6	30	22.9
College Degree (4 year)	8	7.0	10	7.6
Graduate Experience	4	3.5	4	3.2
Totals	115	100.0%	131	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 2.84$, $df = 4$, $p > .05$

The majority of parents in the study (97 percent) had a preschool-aged child in the home (0 - 5 years). Only 1.5 percent of the sample had "only" a school-aged child in the home (6-12 years). However, 32.8 percent of the sample had a preschool-aged child and a school-aged child in the home. Table 4 shows the age groups of children in the respondents' homes.

Table 4
Age of Children in the Home

Age Groups	Frequency	Percent
0 - 2 only	15	11.5
3 - 5 only	60	45.8
6-12 only	2	1.5
0-2 & 3-5	13	9.9
0-2 & 6-12	4	3.1
3-5 & 6-12	29	22.1
0-2, 3-5 & 6-12	8	6.1
Totals	131	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 131.78$, $df = 6$. $p < .001$

A majority, or 73.3 percent of the parents had no teen(s) present in the home; 26.7 percent did have at least one teen present in the home as illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5
Number of Teens Present in the Homes of Respondents

Number of Teens	Frequency	Percent
0	101	73.3
1	26	18.8
2	10	7.2
3	1	.7
Totals	138	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 183.89$, $df = 3$, $p < .001$

When considering income, a majority of parents had a total family income of less than \$15,000 a year. Specifically, 45.9 percent of the families samples had a total family income of less than \$10,000 per year. Forty-six percent of the families had moderate family incomes of between \$10,000 to \$24,999, while just 8.1 percent had total family incomes above \$25,000 a year. See Table 6.

Table 6.

Frequency and Percentage of Income Level for Survey Respondents

Income Level	Frequency	Percent
Less than \$3,000	13	10.7%
\$3,000 - \$4,999	11	9.0
\$5,000 - \$6,999	15	12.3
\$7,000 - \$9,999	17	13.9
\$10,000 - \$11,999	14	11.5
\$12,000 - \$14,999	14	11.5
\$15,000 - \$24,999	28	23.0
\$25,000 and above	10	8.1%
Total	122	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 14.35$, $df = 7$, $p < .05$

It is especially interesting to note that when examining a self-perceived measure of socio-economic status among respondents, 35.2 percent described their family SES as "low", while 60.9 percent described their status as "medium", with 3.9 percent having noted a "high" status. Despite the proportionately low-income of families, a relatively high number of parents identified their family SES as "medium". These data are provided in more detail in Table 7.

Table 7.

Frequency and Percent of Responses to Survey Question: "How would you describe your family's socio-economic status?"

Response	Frequency	Percent
"Low"	45	35.2%
"Medium"	78	60.9
"High"	5	3.9
Total	128	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 191.54$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$

Generally, the parents sampled in the survey had low to medium income levels (Table 6). A majority of them had completed high school or had some college experience (Table 3). Most of the families were headed by a single parent (75.2 percent) and did not have any in-laws or grandparents living in their home (Table 2). Despite the absolute income status, most of the respondents described their socio-economic status in the community as "medium" (Table 7).

Substantive Findings

Within this study population, the variable "when" child care services are needed is very critical to parental perceptions of child care. Specifically, 74.6 percent of the respondents do not believe that child care is available at the hours of the day or evening when it is needed most (see Table 8). Forty percent of the parents did not believe that adequate child care was available at odd times, during weekends or holidays, if it were needed (see Table 9).

Table 8.

Frequencies and Percent of Responses to the Survey Statement:
 "The hours of the day and evening when child care is available
 are convenient."

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Agree	8	5.8
Sometimes Agree	8	5.8
Sometimes Disagree	19	13.8
Disagree	103	74.6
Total	138	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 183.66$, $df = 3$, $p < .001$

Table 9.

Frequency and Percent of Responses to the Survey Statement: "If I
 need child care services on weekends, at off times, or during
 holidays, it is available to me."

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Agree	69	52.3
Sometimes Agree	10	7.5
Sometimes Disagree	31	23.5
Disagree	22	16.7
Total	132	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 59.08$, $df = 3$, $p < .001$

The importance of "when" care is needed relative to parental perceptions of child care is supported further upon examining the relative impact of each of the independent variables on the outcome measure. The statistical technique used to analyze the relationship between the dependent variable, perceptions of child care, and selected independent variables was multiple regression analysis. Specifically, a stepwise regression technique was used to determine how much variability in the outcome measure could be explained by a set of variables which were theoretically related.

Table 10 presents findings which indicate that there was a moderately low multiple correlation coefficient ($R = .35$) for the set of variables regressed on child care perceptions. In effect, 12 percent of the variability in child care perceptions scores was accounted for by three predictor variables.

Table 10.

Summary of Stepwise Regression of Major Predictor Variables on Perception of Child Care Scores

Independent Variable	Multiple R	Beta Weight	R Square	R Square Change
"When Care is Needed	.3259	.32	.1063	.1063
Age of Child(ren)	.3437	.11	.1182	.0119
Presence of Teens	.3534	-.08	.1250	.0067
Multiple Correlation Coefficient			.35 *	
Multiple Coefficient of Determination			.12	

* $p < .01$

The variable with the greatest contribution was the measure, "When" Care is Needed. This is followed by a measure of Age of Children and then the Presence of Teens in the Home, which had a relatively low relationship with the outcome measure.

In addition to the stepwise regression, T-tests and variance analyses were generated for selected variables. These analyses are presented and analyzed in Tables 11 through 17. Each of these tables is followed with a descriptive analysis for each.

Table 11.

Summary of T-test on Perceptions of Child Care Scores for One-and Two-Parent Groups

Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	t	DF	Probability
Single Parent	79	44.6	5.19	.584	.051	108	.31
Two Parent	39	44.1	5.83	.047			

There was no significant difference between mean scores for one-parent and two-parent groups on Perceptions of Child Care Scores ($t = 51$, $p = .31$). The relative low mean scores (Table 11) suggest that neither the single-parent nor the two-parent family respondents perceived child care services to be adequate.

Table 12.

Summary of T-test on Perceptions of Child Care Scores from Multi-Generation and Non Multi-Generation

Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	t	DF	Probability
Multi- Generation	26	44.4	.87	.869	0.13	111	.45
Non Multi- Generation	87	44.6	.59	.596			

There is no significant difference between families classified as multi-generation and those classified as nonmulti-generation on Perceptions of Child Care Scores (Table 12).

Table 13.

Analysis of Variance Summary Table for Family Structure by perceptions of Child Care Scores

Source	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Significance
Between Groups	8.14	2	4.07	0.14	.87
Within Groups	3123.32	107	29.19		

In an examination of families classified as one-parent or multi-generation, the data in Table 12 would indicate no significant relationship between family structure and Perceptions of Child Care Services Scores ($F = .45$, $p = .87$).

Table 14

Analysis of Variance Summary Table for Income Groups by Perceptions of Child Care Scores

Source	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Significance
Between Groups	182.32	8	22.80	0.81	.59
Within Groups	2980.38	106	28.12		

Neither of the family income groupings is significantly related to the level of Perceptions of Child Care Services Scores.

Table 15.

Analysis of Variance Summary Table for SES Groups by Perceptions of Child Care Scores

Source	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Significance
Between Groups	83.95	4	20.99	0.75	.56
Within Groups	3078.75	110	27.99		

Respondents identified themselves as belonging to a low, medium or high socio-economic group. There was not statistical significance between one's self-perceived SES and Perceptions of Child Care Scores (Table 15).

Table 16.

Analysis of Variance Summary Table for Age Groups of Children by Perceptions of Child Care Scores

Source	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Significance
Between Groups	213.18	6	35.53	1.55	.17
Within Groups	1717.28	75	22.90		

Age, in terms of age range of children in the home, is not significantly related to perceptions of child care.

The findings indicate that the sample of 138 parents who participated in this study were basically a homogeneous group. The study was limited to black parents who had children enrolled in child care centers throughout Washington, D.C. Each center receives some public funds which are used to supplement the expanding costs of child care services. When reviewing major demographic characteristics of the study subjects, a majority (75 percent) represented single- or one-parent households. The age groups of children in the home varied despite the fact that 97 percent of the parents had at least one pre-school-aged child in the home; 32 percent had a least one school-aged child in the home, and 26 percent of the parents had a teen present in the household. (See Tables 4 and 5).

While 45.9 percent of parents reported a total family income below \$10,000 annually and 46 percent of the parents reported a moderate total family income of \$10,000 to \$24,999, a majority, 60.9 percent of respondents identified their socio-economic status as "medium" (see Tables 6 and 7).

Of the five predictor variables entered into a stepwise regression equation, three were identified as being statistically significant. These variables, in order of their relative impact on the dependent variable are: When care is needed; age of child(ren); and presence of teens in the home.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This section will analyze further the statistical findings, previously put forth, in relationship to the hypotheses generated at the onset of the study. Each hypothesis will be discussed as to whether it can be accepted or rejected based on a brief summary of the findings pertaining to each hypothesis. Finally, the overall findings of the study will be discussed in terms of the importance to and impact on the research community, practice professionals, and the public.

Results of Hypothesis Testing

The overall objective of this study was to examine the perceptions of black parents about child care services currently available to them. The target population for the research was black parents with children currently enrolled in center-based child care centers in Washington, D.C. Of special concern was determining if parental perceptions of child care (dependent variable) could be explained, in part, by a set of variables which were theoretically related. The primary statistical

technique used to analyze the relationship between the dependent variable, parental perceptions of child care, and selected independent variables, was multiple regression analysis, using a step-wise technique.

One major research question can be summarized as follows:
How do the demographic dimension of types of family structure, presence of teens, socio-economic status and age of child(ren), as well as "when" care is needed relate to parental perceptions of child care?

The four hypotheses which were generated from the aforementioned research question are presented below, one by one, with a brief summary of the pertinent findings.

Hypothesis 1: Among parents of children in center-based care, perceptions of child care will be more related to family structure than will be related to SES.

The stepwise regression procedure computed did not recognize family structure as being in the equation ($B = -.03$). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is rejected based on the outcome of the stepwise regression procedure.

Hypothesis 2: Among parents of children in center based care, perceptions of child care will be more related to the age of the child(ren) than will be related to SES.

The age of child(ren) was the factor with the second highest contribution to the outcome measure (Table 10). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is accepted.

Hypothesis 3: Among parents of children in center-based care, perceptions of child care will be more related to "when" care is needed than will be related to SES.

Hypothesis 3 is accepted because when care is needed is the variable making the greatest contribution to variability in the outcome measure (Table 10.).

In summary, three of the four hypotheses were accepted based on the outcome of a stepwise regression analysis. In effect, a null hypothesis, relative to the relationship between socio-economic status and parental perceptions of child care, is accepted. There was no significant relationship between socio-economic status and parental perceptions.

It may be that family structure would be a statistically significant factor if a stratified sample were used such that equal numbers of one- and two-parent and multi-generation and nonmulti-generation family groups were studied. The same may be said of socio-economic status. However, as the literature points out, arbitrary groupings of black subjects into socio-economic classifications, when developed by traditional means, are inappropriate (Chunn, 1977; Epstein, 1973; Rosenberg, 1973). The pre-selection of a stratified sample based on socio-economic status determined by subjective measures would be difficult to administer; however, research has found that individuals may have attitudes and behaviors of one social class even if their income and education would place them in another social class (Centers, 1961; Boling and Lee, 1972).

Therefore, if this study were replicated and socio-economic status was entered as a predictor variable for a stratified random sample of low, medium, and high SES groupings, SES should be determined, using subjective measures.

Conclusions

On the basis of this analysis of variables associated with parental perceptions of child care, the following concluding statements and suggested implications for further study are offered.

This study was motivated by national child care issues regarding the role of government, specifically the federal government, in assisting families with their child-rearing responsibilities, and the need for policy relevant data, both at the national and local levels, that can facilitate the formulation of policy and prudent decision-making regarding the nature of public support to families for child care services.

The focus on black families was in response to the general lack of race-specific data in public policy research related to the child caring needs of families. There is an irony associated with such a fact, given the traditionally large number of black parents who work and therefore require some type of child caring arrangement for young children during part of the day or evening. Also, while current national statistics are not collected and maintained by the federal government, black children have traditionally comprised approximately forty-four percent of the total enrollment among non-profit centers that receive public funds (Coelen, 1978).

The purposes of this study were (1) to contribute substantive findings to the research literature on the black family relative to child care, (2) to provide a public policy research perspective for use in the formulation of child care policy using

the black family as a unit of analysis, and (3) to contribute to the body of information which can be used by advocates and public policy practitioners to support initiatives designed to meet the child care needs of black families.

The study was designed to determine the relationship between the dependent variable, perceptions of child care and the following independent variables:

- (1) Family structure
- (2) Presence of teens
- (3) Socio-economic status
- (4) Age of child(ren)
- (5) "When" child care is needed

A moderately low multiple correlation coefficient ($R = .35$) was generated for the set of variables regressed on parental perceptions of child care. Through the use of a stepwise regression technique, it was learned that 12 percent of the variability in child care perceptions was accounted for by three predictor variables. The variable with the greatest contribution as "When" care is needed. This is followed by AGE of child(ren) and then Presence of teens, which had a relatively low relationship to the outcome measure. The major findings of this study are supported by the research literature.

Limitations

The design and implementation of this study included several methodological factors which limited, to some extent, the nature and significance of some conclusions which could be drawn. The breakdown of family structure among the respondents was such that the number of single parents (107) limited the relative impact of family structure on the outcome measure, parental perceptions of child care.

Secondly, by limiting the study to parents of children in one type of child care arrangement, center-based care, the findings are limited and narrowly focused. Other child care arrangements are certainly utilized by black parents, including family day care (child cared for by non-family member outside the home), in-home care, and care by relatives. In the District of Columbia and other cities around the country, public funds can be used to subsidize the cost of child care provided in the child's home as well as for care provided in family day care homes.

Finally, it should be noted here that the findings from this research are limited as to their generalizability. Specifically, the population sample examined is composed of black, low- to moderately low-income parents whose children are enrolled in child care centers in Washington, D.C. This vast majority of the parents are female and single heads-of-household. While such a sample limits the ability of the researcher to generalize the

findings it is a very critical demographic feature in the black community which deserves closer examination.

Implications

The results of this study suggest the need for responsible planning and prudent decision-making relative to the formulation of policies and programs at the national, state, and local levels, which will meet the diverse and ever-changing child care needs of families. In considering the issue of "When" care is needed, the findings of this study indicate that care is not generally available during some critical times of need.

Many parents need care during hours other than the traditional working hours of nine to five. Working schedules today are such that parents may work at night or during the weekend. Some communities have begun to experiment with the creation of "drop-in" or twenty-four hour child care programs.. Some of the more difficult times to secure adequate child care include when a child is sick and during national holidays. Unfortunately, most child care programs, particularly center-based programs, close during national holidays. It is important for existing child care centers to consider the expansion and flexibility of their hours of operation.

The findings of this study indicate that the majority of respondents (74.6 percent) believe that services are not available at the hours of the day or evening when care is needed most (Table 8). Additionally, 40 percent do not believe that child care is available on weekends, at odd times, or during holidays when needed (Table 9).

Considering the actual development and promotion of early childhood programs, it can be argued that every child has "special needs" and every child care need is a special need. Every effort must be made to address the early childhood development needs of children and the child care needs of all families who want and need assistance in fulfilling their child-rearing responsibilities. For example, the age of the child in need of child care continues to be an issue of concern to parents as there are fewer community resources and programs available to serve the very young child (0-3 years) and the older or school-aged child (6-12 years).

To better meet the child caring needs of families today, a "diversity model" of service which promotes the development of a variety of programs in varied settings, which provide care during odd times of the day, night, or week, and which addresses the developmental needs of all children, regardless of age, is preferred. In addition, such a model should provide financial assistance to families in need of help.

The analyses of family composition and relationships are often used as indicators of the presence or absence of human resources potentially available for primary or supplemental child care. The findings of this study did not indicate that family structure is a statistically significant factor in predicting parental perceptions of child care. There are several factors which may influence this fact. First, the nuclear family structure of one or two parents and child(ren) seems to be more prevalent today. The extended family network is simply not available to provide that human resource potential for child care. Secondly, the current increase of births to adolescent mothers has created a population of "young grandparents" who are active participants in the paid labor force and who maintain active lives independent of their children and grandchildren.

Declining federal support for child care services coupled with the increased responsibility for social services among state governments, increased labor force participation among women, and changing family structures and roles are converging societal forces which require a more responsive and responsible approach to planning child care delivery systems. The demand for child care by the turn of the century, as unprecedented numbers of women with young children are expected enter the work force, will necessitate a total community response such that all levels of government, the private sector, and employers must assume more responsibility in addressing the child care needs of families. Today, during these times of increasing demand for child care and decreasing public dollars (for child care), particularly at the federal level, program planners and policy-makers must be creative in their approach to service delivery and they must ensure that the plans for such services are based on actual need.

Too often in the past and even today, policy decisions are made in total isolation from the beneficiaries of services. Particularly in the area of child care, public funding for services has resulted in a dual system of care in which the parents of the children in subsidized child care programs are not considered or consulted when decisions are made about which age group of children will be served or when the services will be available. Particularly when resources are limited, it is prudent to plan services which can "serve" and address the human service needs of those for whom such programs are intended.

Because of the importance of planning or even revising existing child care services so that they are responsive to human needs, it would be helpful to local planning efforts to replicate this study in other communities. In addition to facilitating local planning for child care services, it would be useful to determine if the findings of this study also exist in a national probability sample of black parents and if there are similarities or differences between urban and rural parental perceptions of

child care. It would also be important to determine if the same findings would be supported among parents of children in private for-profit child care centers.

If the findings of similar studies were supportive, it might provide needed ammunition on Capitol Hill and within the Executive Branch to create and fund demonstration projects which emphasize creative efficient program planning based on expressed community-based child care needs. However, under the current political climate, the future of "small" legislative initiatives is suspect despite evidence which suggests that what is actually needed is a National Child Care Policy, or more definitively, a National Family Policy. Such a policy should address the developmental needs of young children as well as the service needs of working parents as indicated by the findings of this research. Currently, the program needs of parents are at odds with the resource availability, given the expansive needs of working parents. Any national policy should ideally be comprehensive in scope and should dictate that care is available when parents need it (twenty-four hour care) versus availability at the convenience of providers or employers.

In addition to a focus at the national level, emphasis must be placed on state and local policies which currently do not address comprehensive service needs. State and local governing regulations and licensing standards, for the most part, would deny the availability of twenty-four hour child care. Additionally, the agencies responsible for administering child care services at the state and local levels often limit the focus or comprehensive nature of services. For example, services administered through departments of education often emphasize the educational needs of the child while overlooking the needs of parents in planning and coordinating services. A comprehensive approach to delivering child care services recognizes the importance of attendant family support services such as health and nutrition, consumer education, education and training, regardless of sponsoring agency or auspice.

At all levels of government--federal, state, and local-- the development of effective policies and approaches to service delivery in child care will require a commitment to prudent decision-making, which reflects the needs of parents and children, among law-makers, advocates, and child care providers. Advocacy groups can play a critical role in directing the future policy formulation which may initially meet "bare minimum" needs but which can be expanded over the years.

Because of the importance of involving all levels of government in addressing the child care "crisis" today, the roles and relationships among all levels of government should be re-evaluated by advocates as well as policy-makers. Efforts must be continued at each level of government to expand the availability

of services and resources. Creative approaches to public/private partnership are critical to mobilizing resources, particularly at the local level. Pressure for child care support at the local level will eventually be filtered to politicians who can be quite effective and influential in demanding increased support for services.

Finally, the research findings of this study have special implications for the planning and implementation of services to the black community. These findings suggest that young, single females are assuming primary responsibility for the care of their children. This would indicate a need for child care delivery models which recognize this phenomenon and which seek to address many of the problems associated with single-parenting. Such problems will range from the need for basic financial support to the need for child-rearing and parenting support services. Models for program delivery will require creative approaches to identifying and addressing the opinions and aspirations of young mothers relative to family support and child-rearing help.

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